

January 10, 2014

Letters About Literature
Competition Level 2
P.O. Box 5308
Woodbridge, VA 22194

Dear Mr. Robert Sharenow,

Looking at the dark blue cover of your book *The Berlin Boxing Club*, I was imagining just another book about Nazi Germany – interesting, but slightly distant as other historical fictions had been. I have read many books based in certain time periods, all of which made history seem more understandable to me. Around one character's life, they would provide information about the people, places, and events during the time. Especially after reading the back of the book, which promised a detailed story about a teenage boy's struggle, I was fascinated, and bought the book from my school Book Fair.

What I did not know when I first bought this book was that it would be remarkably *real*. It was not simply a faraway story of someone else's life, or a description of the Holocaust. It was as alarmingly close to reality as any black and white page can be. It struck deep inside me, with characters that had thorough backgrounds, desires, and connections. Karl Stern was as tangible as anyone standing right beside me, and I watched as he fought back against the persecution, fears, and insecurities in his life.

I stood by as Karl tried to find what and who to believe in and in whom to put his trust. As he put Max Schmeling on a pedestal, I saw myself doing the same thing. In my school, I was in the honors classes among many talented young men and women. Somehow, I always found someone that I respected, someone I felt was so much greater than I was in academics, sports, or social skills. They were placed high upon a pedestal where I could feel them looming above me. Shivering in the shadows, I compared myself to them and found myself terribly lacking and inadequate. I was in a totally different league, and could never come close.

I stood by as Karl tried to fill many roles – some required of him, and some desired by him – and saw myself doing the same thing. Although his situation was much more harsh and oppressive, I also had attempted to fit into many roles. My life had always been a quest for perfection, ever since I was a small child, and anything short of this was disappointment. I had strict boundaries and expectations for myself that I strived to meet. As I struggled through life chasing excellence, I was always stressed. Endless stretching towards the stars eventually becomes tiring.

This is especially true as you attempt to do so without the connection and support from your family. As Karl put his family on the sidelines, I saw myself doing the same thing. He seemed to feel that he bore the pressure by himself, and he became remote with his targeted sister and father as well as his depressed mother. In my own life, I felt that I had to do

everything by myself in my stark perception of reality. *The Berlin Boxing Club* made me remember that I am not alone. I am not benefited from trying to live my life alone, and neither is my family. The family is the unit that is supposed to support each other, love each other, and protect each other during hard times. While one person may be collapsing under pressure, a family can uphold itself with the relationships between the members.

After reading this book, I saw just how far I had distanced myself from reality. I admired how Karl took his life into his own hands to make himself stronger physically as well as strong to protect his family, and realized that he did this not by only focusing on his dreams, but also controlling his reality in order to get here. To be successful in life, you can't distance yourself from what is really happening or from other people – putting people on pedestals or forgetting the relationships of the family will neither have a positive effect on your self-esteem nor make you stronger in any way. You cannot do it on your own! We are all people; we all make mistakes and we can all make ourselves better, especially when we support each other. Things don't happen automatically without effort. To connect the dots between reality and my dreams, I have to accept myself as I am and also deliberately work to make the journey, holding the connections solid and true between my family members and myself.

Sincerely,

Chloe Pryor